U.S. Department of Transportation
United States Coast Guard

Commandant
United States Coast Guard

2100 Second Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20593-0001
Staff Symbol: G-AND
Phone: (202) 267-1013
Fax: (202) 493-7002

United States Coast Guard

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

For

National Distress And Response System Modernization Project (NDRSMP)

The proposed project has been thoroughly reviewed by the United States Coast Guard and it has been determined, by the undersigned, that the broad-based program of modernizing the NDRSMP will have no significant effect on the human environment.

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the Supplemental Program Environmental Assessment (SPEA) for the deployment of NDRSMP prepared by URS Corp. which has been independently reviewed and evaluated by the USCG and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required. The USCG takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the Supplemental Program Environmental Assessment.

Prepared by:

11/7/02
Date

Donna M. Meyer
Environmental Project Manager

Reviewed for Legal Sufficiency:

Nov 6, 2002
Date

Francis H. Esposito
Office of Environmental Law
G-LEL

After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, I find that the proposed Federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in Section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and that it will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment.

Approved by:

11/07/02
Date

Ronald T. Hewitt, Captain
Project Manager

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Prepared by the
United States Coast Guard
National Distress and Response System Modernization Project

I. FEDERAL ACTION

The United States Coast Guard intends to modernize its obsolete maritime search and rescue system, commonly known as "Rescue 21". The goal is to design an integrated system that will provide the necessary tools needed to perform the many required missions of the USCG. The purpose of the system is to provide an efficient, cost-effective, and technologically adequate modernized Maritime 911 that rectifies current deficiencies and adequately supports USCG missions. The deployment of the system is an undertaking subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended.

II. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The 1998 Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA) for the system assessed different modernization technologies as alternatives. The USCG, however, proposes to deploy the new technology by leasing existing communications towers (collocation); using existing USCG equipment that includes limited renovation; and new construction of towers. The Supplemental Program Environmental Assessment (SPEA) considered the following alternatives:

Alternative A - No Action: This alternative does not meet the Purpose and Need, nor meet the overall program objectives and goals since the obsolete NDRSMP would not be modernized. The system would continue to operate with the existing network of analog transceivers. No new communications equipment would be installed on existing towers, leased towers, or newly constructed towers.

Alternative B – Modernize the NDRS by deploying new communications technology to an existing antenna tower site that supports the NDRS: Modernizing existing antenna sites would involve replacing equipment (e.g. towers, antenna), possibly increasing the height of the tower, and the addition of new NDRS communications equipment by placing or installing an equipment shelter.

Under this alternative, three deployment scenarios are possible (1) the tower present at the existing site meets all requirements for installing new equipment and does not require an increase in height; (2) the tower present at the existing site is suitable for installing the equipment but an increase in height is necessary; and (3) the tower present at the existing site is not suitable for installing the equipment and must be demolished and replaced with a new tower.

This alternative would only partially satisfy the Purpose and Need for an efficient, modern, more technologically advanced system. By implementing this alternative

alone, some coverage gaps would still exist. Increasing the height may eliminate some of these gaps, but not all. This would result in unanswered calls for assistance.

Alternative C – Modernize the NDRS by deploying new communications technology to a leased commercial tower: NDRS would be modernized by deploying new communications technology to leased commercial antenna tower sites. The sites included in this alternative are sites that do not currently support NDRS. The USCG would enter into a lease agreement with the service provider to install the NDRS equipment.

This alternative would only partially satisfy the Purpose and Need for an efficient, modern, more technologically advanced system. By implementing this alternative alone, some coverage gaps would still exist. This would result in unanswered calls for assistance. In addition, modernizing the NDRS by implementing this alternative alone would not utilize all of the existing NDRS antenna tower sites, resulting in increased costs for deployment, and under-utilization of some existing tower structures. Any NDRS equipment on existing NDRS antenna tower sites not utilized would be removed and disposed.

Alternative D – Modernize the NDRS by deploying new communications technology to a new undeveloped site: This alternative would provide the deployment of new communications technology to undeveloped sites through construction of new antenna towers. Establishing a new site would involve but is not limited to: clearing/grading the site; constructing concrete foundations as a platform to support a steel antenna tower; constructing an access road; laying cable to the tower; installing utilities (electricity and telecommunications lines), back-up emergency generators, fuel sources; installing an equipment shelter; and installing security systems and fencing.

This alternative would satisfy the Purpose and Need for an efficient, modern, more technologically advanced system. The operational deficiencies would be corrected and the USCG would have a reliable means of meeting its multi-mission activities. However, by implementing this alternative alone, existing NDRS antenna tower sites would not be utilized resulting in increased cost for construction and under-utilization of existing tower structures. Furthermore, this alternative would result in increased environmental risks associated with new construction on undeveloped sites.

The alternatives were analyzed in terms of their ability to meet the Purpose of and Need for modernizing the NDRS. Specifically, they were screened in terms of their ability to correct technological deficiencies. As noted above, Alternatives B and C would not correct all NDRS deficiencies because neither would provide continuous comprehensive communications coverage with gaps in coverage remaining. Both Alternatives C and D would result in increased costs for deployment and under-utilization of existing tower structures. Furthermore, Alternative D would result in increased environmental risks due to new construction activities on undeveloped sites. However, when used together, all the action alternatives meet the Purpose and Need for the system. As a result, all deployment alternatives with the exception of the No-Action Alternative will be used to deploy the NDRS.

III. ACTIONS REQUIRED BY OTHER AGENCIES

The Supplemental Program Environmental Assessment provides the USCG with information of the potential environmental impacts that could result from each of the three action deployment alternatives. As sites are selected for deployment of the NDRS system, the USCG will perform site-specific environmental review and analysis, tiered from the SPEA for any of the alternatives presented.

For specific site analysis, the USCG will be required to coordinate and comply with other regulatory agencies and/or those agencies with special expertise for resources regulated by the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (Section 4(f)), the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Each of these regulations has a separate process for compliance and will result in either a concurrence from the regulatory agency or issuance of a permit.

IV. BASIS FOR FINDINGS

A total of 183 copies of the SPEA were sent to interested parties and a total of 18 comment letters were received during the 30-day public review and comment period.

Based upon a study of the anticipated impacts resulting from the proposed project as documented in the SPEA, and upon comment from Federal, State and local agencies, it is expected the action alternatives, in general, would result in short-term, minor impacts from noise, to water quality, to earth resources (erosion), to solid waste, to socioeconomic impacts (employment), from transportation and access, to recreation (boating safety), and to disproportionately low income and/or minority populations.

Construction activities at individual site-specific locations have the potential to result in long-term, adverse impacts to biological resources (wetlands, floodplains, migratory birds, endangered and threatened species), cultural resources (archaeological, traditional cultural properties), to land uses not on USCG property (coastal zone consistency, unique farmlands, Section 4(f) resources), and visual resources (potential decrease in property values).

The modernization of NDRS from a broad based standpoint is expected to result in minimal cumulative impacts. However, it is reasonable that in some cases there would be other projects in site-specific locations that could contribute to cumulative impacts when considered with the deployment of NDRS.

V. MITIGATION MEASURES

To reduce, minimize or compensate impacts on the environment identified mitigation measures include but are not limited to the following:

Noise: Perform construction outside of breeding/mating season; locate equipment staging area away from noise sensitive receptors; maintain

construction equipment; equip heavy noise generating equipment with standard noise control devices.

Earth resources: Apply applicable local erosion control regulations; install silt fences; place erosion control blankets; re-vegetate with non-invasive species; spread gravel.

Water Resources: Obtain National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit; utilize Best Management Practices (BMPs); place rip rap along any channels; reduce encroachments on floodplains.

Solid Waste Management: Limit land clearing activities; mulch brush and wood d

Transportation/Access: Store construction vehicles/equipment on site during construction activities; coordinate with local jurisdiction for rerouting/lane closures; post appropriate signage on affected roadways; provide timely notification of roadway closures.

Hazardous Materials: Provide training to personnel; provide protective gear; develop hazardous waste management plan; place warning signs; install security fencing; establish permissible exposure limit (PEL) boundary to delineate potential radiation hazard exclusion zone; restrict access to public.

Biological Resources: Consolidate/collocate on existing towers; construct/modify in accordance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Memorandum of Understanding (FWS MOU) and Tower guidelines to the maximum extent practicable; limit construction during growing, nesting, mating, spawning season reduce length and width of any access roads; obtain Section 401 Water Quality Certification and Section 10 and 404 permits; reduce encroachments on 100-year floodplains.

Historic/cultural Resources: Comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Recreation: Avoid Section 4(f) lands to the maximum extent practicable; minimize footprint to the maximum extent practicable; provide monetary or resource replacement compensation.

Visual: Consolidate/collocate communications facilities; paint concrete foundations with earth-tone paint; restore landscape disturbed areas with non-invasive species; screen fences and equipment shelters using fast-growing native shrubs.

Socioeconomic Resources: Enhance landscaping to minimize impairment of visual quality to homes and businesses; align sites if possible to minimize impairment of visual quality homes and businesses.

Land Use: Provide vegetative buffers; coordinate consistency to the maximum extent practicable with local community plans.

Environmental Justice: Enhance landscaping to minimize visual impairment to homes and businesses; utilize minority/underutilized contractors; involve the community by soliciting feedback and providing information on the proposed project and its progress.

The USCG will observe and comply with all applicable Federal, state and local laws, ordinances, regulations, orders, and decrees mandating the protection of the environment during the construction and maintenance phases. For example, the USCG or its designee will be required to obtain any and all permits such as an NPDES Permit, Section 404 permits, endangered species permits, approval of all land disturbance and sedimentation, and erosion plans as required prior to the construction phase.

VI. FINDINGS

Pursuant to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (PL 91-190), as amended, regulations issued by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)(40 CFR Part 1500-1508), U.S. Coast Guard M16475.1D, we advise you of our findings, based on the Supplemental PEA. It is our finding, after careful and thorough consideration of the identified impacts, that the broad program to modernize NDRS nationwide will not have a significant impact on the human or natural environment. However, deployment of the alternatives at individual site-specific locations could result in long-term, adverse impacts to the environment. Each of these future deployment decisions will be addressed individually, using a tiered approach, with due consideration being given to appropriate mitigation.

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the SPEA that has been independently reviewed and evaluated by the U.S. Coast Guard and determined to adequately disclose the environmental issues and impacts of the broad based proposal to modernize the National Distress and Response System. The SPEA provides sufficient evidence for determining that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required for the program of modernizing the NDRS. This document will be used as an aid to assess environmental impacts resulting from the deployment of the system to individual site-specific locations that will be analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Environmental determinations for individual site-specific locations will be the subject of additional analysis and compliance.